

did not belong to a frat, or Glee Club, never helped out in the office, not in the school store, didn't write for the paper. I turn the pages, page after page of my class peers, pictures by the thousands, stacks and stacks all skulls like a European catacomb. yearbook faces: hungry and ignorant, optimistic, wanting the freedom and prosperity of American Ivory soap and Wonder bread. I was right about everybody. in their portraits I see: drug addicts, alcoholics, bureaucrats, divorcees, rapists, the murder of all life on the planet. I see suburbs and mortgages, two rusting cars, unemployment and unpaid bills, higher prices, wishes with broken spines, dreams in cold conversations over a second cup of coffee, ulcers, hernias, and ruptures, mastectomies, hysterectomies, wrinkles, psychosis, neurosis, schizophrenic eyes, open heart surgery, fat bellies, sagging tits, and one lousy poet.

#### STREET OF POETS

across the street lives a boy  
who never comes outside much  
and when he talks he chews  
his tongue. he never walks  
the dog. he never cuts the  
grass. he is a poet. and  
then there is the old woman  
with her blue hair, who is  
our block guard, who peeks  
through a crack in her drapes  
at every noise, at every car  
stopping, starting. she has  
the dirt on everybody. she's  
a poet. and then there is  
the immigrant man with his  
skin like dried clay who  
feeds the street's stray cats,  
and the divorced woman with  
her high high heels and the  
nut down the block who helps  
the garbage men heave the black  
Heafy bags full of vodka  
bottles, chicken bones, and  
moldy cucumbers: they are poets,  
waiting for the high point  
of the day: the mailman!



who comes at 4 o'clock. on this  
street of poets everyday  
everyone hopes the mail will  
be good, rewarding, announce  
the prize, offer the trip  
to Las Vegas, be a surprise,  
a sunrise, but the mailman  
in our neighborhood is the  
grim reaper, hauling on his  
back invitations to nothing  
and nothing but rejection.

-- Michael Basinski

Buffalo NY

#### FOREMAN FIRED JOE

We called them cookie-cutters --  
huge presses punching out  
their little steel cookies.  
You stand on a platform  
and feed blank discs into two presses,  
running back and forth  
to keep them both loaded.  
Used to be a two-man job  
till a new-hire who didn't know better  
fed both presses at once  
and the job got re-classified.

I did that job one day in summer heat.  
Running back and forth like that,  
sweat soaking my coveralls, shoes,  
I started hating myself on that platform.  
But I needed the money  
so I kept feeding  
till I slipped and fell.  
Another worker stopped the presses.

I ran to the bathroom and soaked  
my body in water. Foreman yelled  
but I had blood to show.  
Driving home, I swore I'd quit  
before I did that job again.

When Joe walked off that job  
and got fired, the union didn't do  
anything -- he didn't have his 90 days in.  
I wanted to quit in support  
but I wiped my hands,  
took his place up there.